

THE GROWTH OF INDIVIDUALISM

187

century down to the removal of Coke from the Bench in 1616, the judges were from time to time staying proceedings before the Court of High Commission by prohibitions, or discharging offenders imprisoned by it. In 1577, for example, they released on a writ of *Habeas Corpus* a prisoner committed by the High Commission on a charge of usury.¹⁰

Most fundamental of all, there was the growth of a theory of the Church, which denied the very principle of a discipline exercised by bishops and archdeacons.

The acquiescence of the laity in the moral jurisdiction

of the clergy had been accorded with less and less readiness for two centuries before the Reformation.

With the growth under Elizabeth of a vigorous Puritan movement, which had its stronghold among the trading and

commercial classes, that jurisdiction became to a considerable proportion of the population little less

than abhorrent. Their dislike of it was based, of course, on weightier grounds than its occasional interference in

matters of business. But their attitude had as an inevitable result that, with the disparagement of the whole

principle of the traditional ecclesiastical discipline, that particular use of it was also discredited. It was

not that Puritanism implied a greater laxity in social

relations. On the contrary, in its earlier

phases it
stood, at least in theory, for a stricter
discipline of the
life of the individual, alike in his business
and in his
pleasures* But it repudiated as anti-
Christian the
organs through which such discipline had in
fact been
exercised. When the Usury BUI of 1571 was
being
discussed in the House of Commons,
reference to the
canon law was met by the protest that the
rules of the
canon law on the matter were abolished,
and that
⁴¹ they should be no more remembered
than they
are followed.¹ ¶ Feeling against the
system rose
steadily during the next two generations;
excom-
munications, when courts ventured to
resort to them,
were freely disregarded;^M and by the
thirties of